

VZCZCXRO8249  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHMS #0397 1531145  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 011145Z JUN 08  
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9630  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 000397

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/01/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [LE](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: DOHA ACCORD BEST CHANCE FOR MARCH 14 TO REGAIN  
ADVANTAGE IN LEBANON

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo per 1.4 (B and D).

¶1. (C) Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi told the Ambassador June 1 that albeit a far-from-perfect solution, the Doha agreement offers the March 14 coalition its best chance for regaining the political advantage in Lebanon. He urged the U.S. to continue its support for PM Siniora as well as newly elected President Sleiman. He recommended against precipitous action on Shaba'a Farms, arguing that it would be fruitless until Israel and Syria reach an agreement.

¶2. (C) Bin Alawi said that the Doha agreement had effectively stopped the political hemorrhaging within Lebanon. The government's actions on the airport and Hizbollah's communication network were a provocation that neither Siniora nor March 14 was politically powerful enough to sustain. Hizballah, itself facing internal divisions, operates best in a crisis and successfully met the challenge brought on by the government, forcing the confrontation to the brink and leading to the Doha negotiations. Siniora and Sa'ad Hariri cannot make "that mistake," i.e., provoking a crisis, again. They will be bested by Hizballah every time.

¶3. (C) Instead, argued bin Alawi, Siniora and March 14 must use the period between now and next year's parliamentary election to rebuild and to regain the political advantage. Unlike Hizballah, they operate best when there is sufficient political space and peace. Done correctly, he proffered, the March 14 rebuilding effort could lead to success in the parliamentary elections with a solid parliamentary majority and to regaining the advantage in the cabinet.

¶4. (C) Bin Alawi dismissed Shaba'a farms from the political equation. "It will only make sense once the Syrians and Israelis reach an agreement." At that point, he said, Lebanon will fall into place, vis-a-vis a settlement with Israel, and Sheba'a will "resolve itself." Until then, neither Israel nor Syria would be willing to let go of this leverage each has over Lebanon. He said he had told Siniora this when the two met briefly last week in Beirut during the election and installation of Sleiman as president.

¶5. (C) Overall, said bin Alawi, the agreement ultimately gave Hizballah what it had wanted and, therefore, could hardly be considered the outcome that other Arab governments wanted. He concluded, however, that it ended the Lebanese political crisis, avoided further bloodshed, and offered March 14 breathing space to reassert itself and win back popular support. It is the only way they can effectively confront Hizballah. The minister praised Qatari Emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and PM Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr al-Thani for their efforts in Doha to press for an agreement.

At one point, he said, PM Hamad bin Jassim had telephoned Syrian President Bashar al Asad to insist that he fully support the agreement. At one stage, he "undiplomatically" threatened the Syrian with political isolation, promising that the Arab Sunnis would never surrender Lebanon.

GRAPPO